The Daily Astorian.

Vol. XVIII. Astoria, Oregon, Tuesday Morning, March 20, 1883. No. 145.

WHITMAN'S OLD WAGON.

The Oregon question finally turned on wheels. Even Webster and Ashburton; the high contracting parties to settle the international boundary on the north from ocean to ocean, could carry the line of division no farther west than the Rocky mountains. Their diplomacy, civil engineering and the two nations—all concerned—had to wait for the wagons. The taking of one through overland to the Columbia, by Dr. Whitman, was the most important act in all preliminaries in the settlement of Oregon controversy. At first only two parties took a proper view of a wagon for Oregon—Marcus Whitman and the Hudson Bay company. In 1836 there at Fort Hall and Fort Boise, it, with its two women, suggested to the company, the family and civilized home and permanent settlement in Oregon, and a highway from the Missouri to that settlement that others could follow. The company, therefore, determined to turn the wagon back or direct it to California, or stop it absolutely. Dr. Whitman took the same view of the wagon, and therefore concluded to take it through to Oregon. But we must go back a little in the story.

When the fur traders and the missionary party arrived at Fort Laramie, it was assumed, as a matter of course, that all wagons and carts, would, as usual, be abandoned, as it was thought impracticable to proceed further with them. The doctor had been brought up in New England where there is much antagonism between wheels and mountains, and he had been educated to overcome it. He was not, therefore, disposed to give up to the Rocky mountains. He objected to the abandonment of the wagons. The doctor had purchased two for the party at Liberty on the Missouri, and now it seemed very desirable, on account of the ladies, to take along at least two of them. There was much discussion over it between the missionaries and the traders, and, finally, the latter consented to make the experiment, and at the same time added one of their cattle to the mission wagon. Dr. Whitman was put in charge of the carriages, and the first night out from Fort Laramie he came into camp late, warm and puffing, and cheery too, for he had only one upset with the wagon and two with the cart. So affairs progressed, with various accidents to the wagon and cart, now a capsize and now a repair, now a man and now a mule objecting, and with equal Roman firmness till they arrived

AT THE GREAT FAIR GROUNDS

of traders and Indians in the mountains. When they put out for the rendezvous, all parties and persons except the Flatheads advised them to leave the wagon. However, after camp was made, the doctor came in, and, to the general surprise, with his four-wheeled companion. "He was totally alone," says Gray, the historian, one of his company, "in his determination to get his old wagon through to the waters of the Columbia, and the mission station that might be established, no one knew where."

There is no sound like that made by a stout loaded wagon on a rough road, and now, after 6000 years or so of stillness in these wild regions, these sounds woke the echoes of the grand old mountains. Perhaps out of respect to the prehistoric Americans who are patiently wating for American antiquaries to return from the old world and ask a few home questions, we ought to doubt that 6,000. We can hear them now, in our mental ear, those Whitman wagons, and it will help the hearing if one will pronounce aloud the name that the Indians gave the "old wagons." They put together the jerky syllables the sound it made as it rose and fell and stopped in the soft grass and among the rocks, and called it: "chick-chick-shani-le-kal-kash." On the caravan moves, trader and Indian and preacher and women, mules, pack-saddles and ponies—the wagon far in the rear, now saying on the grass land 'chick chick' and now among the rocks 'kal kash.' Mr. Gray says; "It is due to Dr. Whitman to say, notwithstanding that this was the most difficult route we had to travel, yet he persevered with his old wagon, without any particular assistance. From Soda Springs to Fort Hall his labor was immense, yet he overcame every difficulty and brought it safe through. I have since traveled the same route three times, and I confess I cannot see how he did it."

Arrived at Fort Hall, about 100 miles north of Salt lake, all baggage and luggage is reduced as much as possible and repacked. Here the parties—mission and Hudson's Bay, and postmen too—combine to say that the wagon can be hauled no further. The terrible canons and bottomless creeks in the Snake plains make it impossible. But the iron doctor is immovable. Then they say he must at least take it apart and pack it if it goes on. Finally the indomitable man makes a compromise, converts the wagon into a cart, loads in the duplicate wheels and axle tree, and starts again, on whels, for the Columbia. More clumsy compromises between religious creeds and political platforms have been made, and, after all, it was the same thing, whether it went forward

ON TWO WHEELS OR FOUR,

be it wagon or cart, and if it carried the substance of doctrine, and the wheels echoed "chick chick" on the soft grass and the "kal-kash" of the rocks meant the same thing—the one wagon and its one load. True, when they come to the Snake river, both the cart and its driver had to do some swimming, but they both came out on the west bank, and so much nearer to Oregon. So they finally entered Fort Boise, two miles below Boise City. This was so rude a structure that it would hardly pass for a cattle pen or mule coral. Here the cart took on a very serious look, and so did every man when he looked at it. The expressions of opinion as to its further advance became more decided, and some of them terse and brief and to missionary ears, more inelegant than to mountaineers. The escort of Hudson's Bay men had stopped at Ft. Hall, and all but the doctor felt the need of moving on in a light and compact and very defensible order. It was again suggested to take it apart and pack it through, if the mules carrying it would not slide from the precipices they would have to scale and descend.

Finally another compromise was effected. The wagon should be left at Fort Boise till some one could come back and take it on to the established mission. This was done, and judgments harmonized soon after the "old wagon" went through, the first to pass the plains and the mountains so far toward Oregon.

Thus the irrepressible energy of this man pioneered for a carriage way to Oregon in 1836. The year before, the first house had been built in San Francisco, steam cars had run out from Boston toward Lowell and Worcester and Providence, and this year 1,273 miles of rail had been laid in the country, and the whistle and rattle of locomotives were full of the prophecy of the 90,000 miles of it that we have to-day. So the "chick-chick-shani-le-kal-kash" of the doctor was not one of the minor prophets.

The movement of this nation westward on wheels is an interesting study. One of the earliest in it may be found in the records of Newton, Mass., for the year 1687: "John Ward and Noah Wisewall were joined to our selectmen to treat with the selectmen of Cambridge, to lay out a highway from our meeting house to the Falls." We cannot trace a current tradition to any other board of highway commissioners. The tradition says that being instructed to lay out a highway into the western wilderness on the Charles river, between its upper and lower falls in Newton, and in the judgment of the commissioners, that point was as far westward as any public road would ever be needed. This bluff was about 10 miles "out west" from the Boston meeting house.

However, the "western fever" so increased that an extension of the public road more than 10 miles from Boston was demanded, for, in the great and general court of Massachusetts for 1683, we find this entry:

"Whereas the way to Kenecticut, now vesed being very hazardous to travellew by reason of our deepe river that is passed fower or five times ouer, which may be avayded as is conceived, by a better and nearer way, it is referred to Maj. Pynchon in order ye said may be layd out and well-marked. We having hired him two Indians to guide him in his way, and contracted with them for fivety shillings it is ordered that the treasurer of the county pay the same in county pay towards the effecting the worke."

One century and one year after the Newton survey, Rufus Putman started with his ox-cart on a three month's journey farther west. Now we hear the old wagon of Marcus Whitman rattling among the head streams of the Columbia. This remarkable and now historic vehicle that had been the center of so many doubts and hard sayings and anxieties as a moving treasure coveted by the Indians, and the subject of so many upsets and unheeded baths, and that had been developed inversely and degradingly into a cart, finally and later comes out all right

ON THE LOWER COLUMBIA,

at Fort Walla Walla. When the company arrive there, in advance of the old wagon, they have been out over four months from the Missouri, having traveled about 2,250 miles. They had made an average of over more than 25 miles a day, which was a good rate for a caravan, since the average of a Roman army was 16 miles. Bruised, broken and badly knocked to pieces in its wrenching and shattering "Kal Kash," the abused and degraded vehicle finally came out in a very respectable condition. Its fierce struggles and good condition after victory remind one much of the battles of the gods of our Northmen ancestors, For a night's frolic they could be hacked and hewed and cut up on a celestial battle-field, and then appear as happy and as good as new the next morning.

When the writer resided in St. Louis, the old family carriage of Gen. Clark, the first that ever crossed the Mississippi, was turned off at auction for 85. Probably to-day its remains rest in some spot, as obscure and as thoroughly covered over by drift in the stream of time as the grave of De Soto, somewhere in the lower Mississippi. It would be a rare antiquity and treasure to head a procession, celebrating the first or second centennial of its "L'Anul du Coup." But the old wagon of Dr. Whitman would be a rarer treasure and relic. It carried more national destiny than the stately coach of the general. Very pleasant historical coincidences associate these two men and the two carriages. In 1804 the general, then lieutenant, went over to view the newly purchased Oregon, and took the first look of the Pacific that an American citizen ever had of it from American soil. Thirty-two years afterward the doctor followed with his wagon on the trail of the general. It would be difficult to find two single acts in the lives of two men that have so marked American history.

The work was done substantially. The wagon and the two brides, Mrs. Whitman and Mrs. Spaulding, had won Oregon. The first wheels had marked the prairie, and brushed the sage, and grazed the rocks, and marked the river banks all the way from the Missouri to the Columbia. How many thousands have since been on that trail, with their long miles of canvas-topped teams! The first white women had crossed the continent, and not only witnessed, but achieved the victory. For in going through, Whitman's "old wagon" had demonstrated that women and children and household goods—the family—could be carried over to Oregon. If so, the United States wanted Oregon, and afterward 200 emigrant wagons went over and took it, under the lead of the same indomitable doctor.—*N. Y. Herald.*